

Des Plaines Split on Hiring Outside Help

By Ames Boykin - Daily Herald

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Critics of privatizing some Des Plaines city services claimed a partial victory Monday night.

While city officials wanted to contract outside firms to handle custodial and crossing guard services next year, aldermen shot down the custodial proposal during a budget hearing.

This is the second year the city council rejected staff's proposal to hire an agency to clean city buildings. It would have eliminated six jobs and saved the city about \$170,000, officials said.

Since the city over the summer approved a new contract with its public works employees, city officials criticized the proposal as underhanded.

"I'm totally opposed to this, and I think it makes us look bad," 5th Ward Alderman Carla Brookman said.

Aldermen voted 4-3 to add \$170,000 back to the 2005 budget to pay the city employees to do the cleaning. The city has proposed spending \$126.9 million next year. The budget is expected to be approved at the Dec. 20 meeting.

Phil Schloss, secretary of the public works union, told aldermen the city would lose quality if they hired a private firm to do the work.

A plan to privatize the crossing guard services met similar discussion on Monday, however aldermen voted 7-1 to pursue the switch.

Police Chief Jim Prandini has proposed hiring Milwaukee-based Twin City Security Inc. to do the work. Currently, the police department has nearly 50 crossing guards on its payroll. The plan also calls for cutting lunch time crossing guard shifts.

Paying private security workers to handle traffic control at Maine West High School will cost the city a little more, so the overall savings to the city from privatizing crossing guards and Maine West traffic duties would be about \$5,000, Prandini said.

The Maine West switch will free police officers to focus on other school duties, he said.

City officials on Monday also discussed funding a study next year to form a tax-increment financing district at the Five Corners area at River and Rand roads.

Earlier Monday, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat, announced that she helped secure more than \$1 million in federal money for Des Plaines.

It will be included in the 2005 budget to help with flood relief efforts, such as rebuilding alleys. The Des Plaines Community Senior Center has been awarded \$72,750 for an expansion project.

Budget: \$1 million to help with flood relief